

PRESERVE EDUCATIONAL CHOICE, INC.

20 REASONS
WHY YOU SHOULD
CHANGE YOUR VOTE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENTS
USED FOR COEDUCATION

SUBMITTED OCTOBER 12, 2006
TO THE TRUSTEES OF
RANDOLPH-MACON WOMAN'S COLLEGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When good people in any country cease their vigilance and struggle, then evil men prevail.
-- Pearl S. Buck

Dear Trustees:

Contrary to the information provided to you, Randolph-Macon Woman's College (R-MWC) can survive as a woman's college. In fact, Randolph-Macon Woman's College can *thrive* as a woman's college.

Since your vote on September 9, PEC has enlisted the support of alumnae volunteers across the country to complete the research necessary to establish that, for at least 20 reasons, you should reverse your vote to adopt the Strategic Plan. This document is the culmination of research that includes the examination of volumes of information, including

- Published statistics;
- Expert testimony;
- Comparative studies across women's colleges and small liberal arts colleges;
- Newspaper articles;
- Financial analysis of R-MWC's budgets and accounting;
- Review of Steering Committee documents; and
- A&S reports.

We have done in one month as much as humanly possible to seek out evidence to support our position. We know that additional study is necessary. Nevertheless, in the pages of this report, PEC has compiled data to refute all of the major assumptions upon which we understand the Board of Trustees based its vote to adopt the Strategic Plan. PEC asks trustees to take the time needed to examine the information presented here, and then gather the courage to do the right thing: overturn your prior vote and do the job you swore to do—keep R-MWC a woman's college. All we ask is that you fairly consider the information provided here. We think it is persuasive.

The information collected here will show, among other things, that:

- ◆ There are sufficient women in the marketplace who will consider a woman's college. Competing women's colleges have proven this. Presidents of other women's colleges similar to R-MWC have publicly stated that application rates have increased by 50-200%. Additionally, published data has established that the potential applicant pool is more than sufficient to supply the incremental difference between current and desired freshman enrollments.
- ◆ The only issue preventing R-MWC from attracting applicants is effective marketing. Other women's colleges have proven that hiring a sophisticated marketing company to revamp admissions marketing results in stronger incoming first year classes. R-MWC, like Sweet Briar, can employ better marketing strategies to revitalize its market presence.

- ◆ R-MWC has engaged in excessive tuition discounting, but testimonials from any number of students indicates that this practice was not necessary. By including tuition discounting schedules in its marketing materials and providing financial aid to students who had already decided to or had agreed to attend, R-MWC voluntarily limited its primary revenue source.
- ◆ Enrolling men is not the solution to tuition discounting. In fact, statistics demonstrate that higher tuition discounting will be required to attract an adequate ratio of male students. The solution is to communicate more effectively with admitted applicants to identify where aid is truly needed; stop using tuition grants as a substitute for an effective marketing program; stop apologizing for being a woman's college; and start selling the unique benefits of education at a woman's college.
- ◆ R-MWC has a higher endowment than any other women's college in Virginia. All three – Sweet Briar, Hollins, and Mary Baldwin – have affirmed their commitment to continue as women's colleges in the wake of R-MWC's September 9th vote. The R-MWC endowment is strong enough to support R-MWC as a woman's college.
- ◆ Importantly, though, no study has been done (or at least, has not been publicized) to predict the "worst case" scenario if R-MWC does admit men. It is entirely possible that the move to coeducation will ultimately harm R-MWC more than if R-MWC were to remain a woman's college.
- ◆ The strategic planning process was not an open and participatory process as claimed. It is becoming apparent that alumnae participation (both financial and volunteer) may drop considerably at rates much higher than those projected by the Board of Trustees if the college admits men.
- ◆ The November 2005 A&S report outlined a viable option for R-MWC to remain a woman's college. As recently as October 9, 2006, in the presentation by A&S to students and faculty, A&S stated publicly that a single-sex scenario was feasible.
- ◆ R-MWC is different from all other colleges that were examined as part of the internal study of former women's colleges, because none of those colleges were required to change their names. This single factor has caused more difficulty than even the Board of Trustees anticipated, in light of the comments from Randolph-Macon College in Ashland.
- ◆ The "global honors" portion of the strategic plan is still not defined, and so far has not engendered much support among faculty members. We ask you to consider whether a plan can truly be called "strategic" (or even a "plan") where the only actionable strategy with respect to the important concept of R-MWC's curriculum is to state that committees will be formed to define the new curriculum plan *after* the strategic plan is adopted.

Within the attached report, trustees will find these and other arguments, with supporting documentation, that cast doubt upon the basis for the adoption of the Strategic Plan and provide arguments that R-MWC may actually have a better chance of surviving in the long run as a woman's

college. PEC and all its supporters (alumnae, parents, students, faculty and ex-trustees), implore you to reverse your vote, to take the PEC “Carrot Plan” of aid and assistance, and preserve Randolph-Macon as a WOMAN’S College. PEC is ready to provide the expertise to ensure it happens.

#1: THERE ARE ENOUGH WOMEN WHO WANT TO ATTEND WOMEN'S COLLEGES.

The argument used most frequently to advocate coeducation is that there is no longer a demand for women's colleges.

To support this assertion, R-MWC administrators and others have cited that only three to four percent of female college-bound high school seniors prefer a women's college¹, a figure based on the student preference questionnaire that is administered to students on a voluntary basis when they take the College Board's SAT test.² Additionally, some R-MWC trustees have cited anecdotal evidence that within their own families they were not able to convince children or grandchildren to attend their *alma mater*.

It is clear that not all women prefer a women's college, just as not everyone prefers a public university. When discussing legacies and the difficulty in convincing children to attend one's *alma mater*, it bears noting that conventional wisdom indicates that children, particularly teenagers, seldom want either to do what their parents tell them to or follow in their parents' footsteps.

To the larger issue of the SAT statistic, while a figure of four percent may not sound like many students, it must be put into perspective. In 2006, four percent of the female, college-bound seniors equated to **31,400** women³. In comparison, **13,141** women were granted bachelor's degrees by women's colleges in 2004,⁴ indicating that there are more than sufficient SAT-taking women alone already interested in applying for the available capacity at women's colleges each year with room for growth.

It is important to keep in mind several additional facts when considering the three to four percent figure:

- Some students take the ACT and not the SAT. In 2006, **87,581** (13.5 percent) of the female graduate ACT test takers indicated that they had "no preference" between women's colleges and coeducational schools;⁵
- Not all students are required to take the SAT. International students and adult students are two large and growing student segments that do not usually take this test (they currently represent a little more than 20 percent of R-MWC's total enrollment); and
- The questionnaire is voluntary and students' perceptions change. The survey is not filled out completely by all students (for example, only 92 percent of females filled out the ACT question about college preference meaning that an additional **7,000** female seniors have no particular preference regarding single-sex education)⁶ and it only asks for a student's "preference" at the point in time she is taking the test. Many students change their stated preference after actually visiting colleges or learning more about their options. Finally, anecdotally many women's college graduates indicate that they never thought they would go to a women's college.⁷

The population of female college students continues to rise, and is projected to increase by 21 percent by 2014 (conversely, the already smaller male college student population is projected to only increase by 12 percent).⁸ Public high school graduates are forecasted to increase by 12 percent in the

South (the second largest regional gain after the West) with significant growth in states where R-MWC has historically been strong like Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia—all predicted to have an 18 percent increase—and Texas, with a 20 percent increase.⁹

The number of bachelor's degrees granted to women is expected to increase by 22 percent by 2014 (only 10 percent for men), and the number of master's degrees granted is expected to rise by 39 percent for women and 30 percent for men—supporting an expansion of R-MWC's offerings in the coeducational graduate school market.¹⁰

In looking at R-MWC's particular case, interim President Worden has gone on record as saying that “the marketing data [compiled by Art and Science Group (A&S)] indicated that the single-sex character of the College was a significant obstacle to achieving our enrollment goals.”¹¹

David Strauss, the partner from A&S that worked with R-MWC, has gone a step beyond that assertion to declare that “his firm's research suggest[s] that most women, even those attending single-sex colleges, would prefer a coeducational institution.”¹²

If anything, the November 2005 “Overall Strategic Recommendations” presented by A&S to R-MWC's Board of Trustees belies Mr. Strauss' statement and clearly shows that current students at R-MWC perceive coeducation as a strong negative factor, not an educational situation they would prefer—even those students who were unhappy enough with the conditions at R-MWC that they seriously considered transferring.¹³

Further, within R-MWC's pool of admitted applicants that were studied by A&S, 26 percent preferred women's colleges (with 5 percent only looking at such) and an additional 42 percent didn't have a preference at all between women's colleges or coed colleges.¹⁴

If we apply this research to the class entering in Fall 2005, we can get a better perspective on the research. With a pool of 675 admitted applicants for Fall 2005¹⁵, the 68 percent that either preferred women's colleges or who had no preference at all was 459 students (meaning that only the remaining 216 accepted applicants needed to potentially be “sold” on the benefits of a women's college). So for 459 students, R-MWC was either competing in a preferential environment as a women's college or solely on its other merits.

R-MWC had a yield of 27 percent for 2005 and matriculated 184 students. While A&S predicted difficulty in converting the admit-declines (491 students), their research indicated that 30 percent of the admit-declines rated R-MWC from an 8-10 on a scale where 10 means “best choice for me.”¹⁶ Given how highly 147 of the declining students rated R-MWC as a “fit” for them, it seems probable that a reasonable percentage of these students could be converted. Coeducation would not be a factor in this conversion, according to A&S's own research, with only a +0.7 change in yield for coeducation. So the problem for R-MWC lies elsewhere than in the single-sex nature of the institution. As the R-MWC Director of Admissions has stated—we have sufficient applications, we just need to become people's number one choice.¹⁷

#2: R-MWC’S ENROLLMENT HAS NOT BEEN IN DECLINE FOR YEARS.

Recent communications from R-MWC’s administrators and trustees have stated that enrollment at R-MWC has been in decline for years.¹⁸ This contradicts statements from the administration made as recently as the 2005 President’s Report where President Bowman called enrollment “steady.”¹⁹ The headcount in 1980 was 732 (full-time equivalent of 713). The headcount in 2004 was 732 (full-time equivalent of 712). There have been many “ups and downs” in the past decades (Table 1) but enrollment can hardly be described as being in a steady decline—it has been relatively stable since 1987 at least.

Year	Headcount	FTE
1987	701	669.5
1988	746	701.9
1989	738	704
1990	691	650.8
1991	769	729.4
1992	736	695
1993	709	672.8
1994	738	697
1995	724	692.9
1996	698	669.4
1997	720	690.4
1998	686	660.9
1999	709	681.9
2000	748	716.3
2001	721	698.4
2002	764	742.4
2003	737	715.7
2004	732	712
2005	713	694.5

Table 1: Enrollment at R-MWC 1987-2005²⁰

The internal research conducted by R-MWC of former women’s colleges concluded that all of the colleges made the move to coeducation at the lowest point of enrollment. Because these changes were made at historic low points, later enrollment gains appear more pronounced.²¹ For R-MWC, that historic low point would have been in 1990. If R-MWC had embraced coeducation in 1990, R-MWC would have missed many very successful years (by comparison) and many years of stable enrollment. By any stretch of the imagination R-MWC (Figure 1) cannot be described as experiencing the dramatic, sustained declines in enrollment that Wheaton College and Goucher College suffered before their decision to go coed in the 1980s.

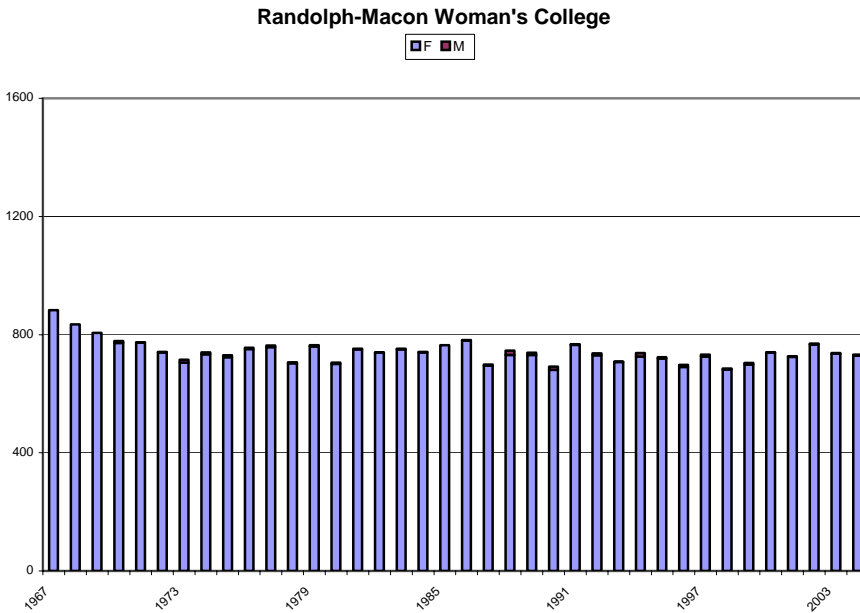


Figure 1: Undergraduate Enrollment by Gender 1967-2004 R-MWC²²

#3: R-MWC DOES NOT HAVE TO “BUY” STUDENTS WITH TUITION DISCOUNTING TO STAY A WOMAN’S COLLEGE.

Tuition discounting can be an effective tool for enrollment management when used properly. Most enrollment professionals see it as a necessary evil that can be used when needed to shape the enrollment of a college by influencing diversity, access, and academic ability in the incoming class. However, if it is mismanaged it can lead a college quickly into financial trouble.²³ R-MWC administrators freely admit that R-MWC has a very high tuition discount rate compared to other liberal arts colleges and that this rate puts the college’s finances in peril.²⁴

Tuition discounting is fundamentally a marketing issue and essentially a matter of perceived value. Aid resources for any college are limited and must be used strategically to the college’s best advantage—not to provide aid to students who would have come otherwise and who have parents who could pay if they only thought the college was “worth it”. R-MWC’s current “financial crisis” has engendered a discussion about tuition discounting that is thinly disguised as “merit scholarships” among current students and recent alumnae. Anecdotally, many have come forward to say that they were surprised when they received a “merit scholarship” for a low B-average and average SAT scores and that in many cases the aid was unnecessary because they had already decided to attend R-MWC and had parents who could afford to pay.²⁵

The implementation of R-MWC’s discounting policy, while it may be complex behind the scenes, seems set up publicly to result in awarding aid to all students. The discount matrix for “merit scholarships” is posted on the college’s website and the printed financial aid collateral features the matrix prominently. Students who have worked in the Admissions Office have described the use of the matrix during student calls and their instructions from Admissions Office staff:

I do not think tuition discounting is as horrible as the college makes it seem. When I worked Admissions Phon-a-thon we were told to sell the merit scholarships. We each had a grid, and would ask the prospective student their GPA and SAT and would tell them approximately how much they could expect to get in scholarships.²⁶

Why were the students “selling” the “scholarships” instead of selling R-MWC’s value proposition? According to A&S, many prospects and applicants who think they know the cost of R-MWC actually estimate it to be substantially lower than it really is.²⁷ One way that this can be interpreted is that the policy of across-the-board discounts positioned as “merit scholarships” isn’t really making an impact in students’ minds. They don’t really see the “scholarship” as a “real” amount of money applied to a “real” price. Instead, the public dissemination of the qualifications and blanket application of the award positions it as a price cut for all and one that doesn’t need to even be taken seriously (everyone gets it after all). Further, the fact that prospects estimate the cost of R-MWC to be much lower than reality may indicate that after reviewing R-MWC’s materials prospects don’t see R-MWC as a school that would cost much money (perhaps it seems cheap or shoddy in some way and not a prestigious college that you would expect to command top dollar). Regardless, R-MWC has a self-inflicted perceived value problem and the solution is not to seek out a new customer segment. The solution is to fix the value proposition, marketing messages and sales process to make smart offers to the right students.²⁸

Critical to making the right offer is having the right pool of students. Here are the facts as presented by R-MWC and A&S:

- Many of the top overlap schools for R-MWC inquirers are now public universities;
- According to A&S not one inquirer identified a private college as their preferred college (which seems unlikely as just the 6 percent of inquirers alone that said they either only considered or they preferred women’s colleges would seem likely, if not required, to identify a private college as their top choice);²⁹ and,
- 39 percent of the R-MWC inquirers surveyed by A&S declared that they only considered coeducational colleges (which begs the question why did they contact what is clearly a woman’s college).³⁰

These facts do not signal that R-MWC needs to admit men to address the enrollment and tuition discounting problem. It indicates that R-MWC is soliciting the wrong pool of applicants. Students who genuinely would prefer to be at the University of Virginia or Virginia Tech will never be satisfied or happy with R-MWC no matter how large the “merit” scholarship or how gender-balanced the campus is.

#4: OTHER WOMEN’S COLLEGES ARE FINANCIALLY VIABLE.

R-MWC administrators and trustees have insisted that it isn’t just R-MWC that is in “crisis”—women’s colleges in general are “failing.” For the trustees there appears to be no future for R-MWC in being a woman’s college leading to the assumption that they believe that all women’s colleges will eventually admit men.

There is no denying that higher education is a very competitive business and at times all colleges may face difficulties growing their enrollment responsibly. Women's colleges are no exception. Even so, the remaining five "Seven Sisters" continue to attract the best students (by any measure), maintain great prestige (with one always listed in the top five national liberal arts rankings and the others usually never lower than 25th), and provide an exemplary and vigorous education for women. Unfortunately R-MWC isn't in the same class as Wellesley College at this time, but it isn't in the same class as Williams College either (and simply admitting men will not make it so).

Other women's colleges outside of the Seven Sisters have had their own struggles, with many considering—then rejecting—coeducation in recent years. Their recommitment to women's education seems to be paying off for them. Based on information obtained from their institutional research divisions, Sweet Briar College, Hollins University, Agnes Scott College, and Mills College are all enjoying success on multiple levels. The yield, academic quality of students, retention, graduation rate and tuition discounting of women's colleges compares favorably and/or on equal footing with former women's colleges like Hood College and Goucher College that the trustees have pointed to as desirable.

One helpful comparison is to look at Sweet Briar College, which recently reaffirmed its status as a women's college. Applications at Sweet Briar have increased (up 54 percent since 2003) as has the size of the first year class (36 percent greater since 2003). Sweet Briar has also increased the academic quality of students and still attracts students nationally, unlike schools like Hood College that have gone coed and become regional, less prestigious schools. The tuition discount rate has fallen at Sweet Briar by about six percent—and it was already lower than R-MWC's to begin with.

Traditionally, R-MWC has attracted the most academically-able students among the women's colleges of the South. At one point, R-MWC was considered the finest women's college in the South and an equal to the best liberal arts institutions in the nation. R-MWC has lost its prestige and superior academic positioning during the past decade. The administration and trustees of the college have chosen to blame this loss on market changes, but given the successes of other women's colleges, isn't it more logical to assume that R-MWC's problems stem from internal mistakes rather than external forces?

#5: THE COLLEGE CAN USE MARKETING TO SOLVE ITS PROBLEMS.

Higher education marketing is generally recognized to be lagging behind corporate marketing by at least a decade, if not more. Many colleges do not have distinct marketing departments and spread their "marketing budget" – which is really just funds for print publications and the occasional consulting firm – across several departments (Admissions, Development, Alumnae Relations, etc.) In recent years many colleges and universities have recognized that marketing is important to the success of the institution and are increasingly forming marketing departments that report to the president, implementing integrated marketing plans (not simply communications plans), and realigning their activities to better serve and support their student bodies (customer focus – the heart of marketing).

R-MWC's administrators and trustees continue to maintain that marketing cannot be used to help with the enrollment, tuition discounting, retention, or other problems. R-MWC has engaged in

“aggressive marketing for ten years”³¹ yet even the basics of marketing – a brand, positioning for various audiences, and messaging for each – do not currently exist. R-MWC has not changed its messaging since Stamats was commissioned to help with marketing several years ago. Materials are designed in-house and admissions staff writes all of the copy. R-MWC’s website is so out of date that the marketing campaign that was discontinued several years ago (“my life, my college”) still appeared as the slogan on the top of all of the web pages until an alumna told the admissions office in September of this year. (They were unaware that the website still looked like that, which begs the question—if even the admissions staff doesn’t look at R-MWC’s website, who does?) Although R-MWC has adopted a mass-marketing approach in the past decade at a greater cost per acquired student, enrollment has not increased. There is no professional marketing staff in-house and no plans to acquire any such staff. By contrast, R-MWC has two graphic designers on the payroll.

Other women’s colleges have enjoyed great success in increasing first year class sizes, student quality, yield rates, and reducing tuition discounting after re-working their marketing materials and/or establishing a marketing department. Sweet Briar College commissioned A&S to aid in establishing effective positioning statements and marketing messages, as has Mills College. Both have enjoyed dramatic successes since working on their marketing.

- At Sweet Briar College applications are up by 54 percent (404 in 2003, 623 in 2005), student academic quality as measured by average GPAs and SAT scores is up, and first year enrollment has increased 37 percent (133 in 2003, 182 in 2005);³² and
- At Mills College, applications in 2005 were up 82 percent after the college established a marketing department, they experienced a 50 percent increase in enrolled first year undergraduate students (136 in 2004, 206 in 2005, with a 2005 yield of 34 percent) and the college considers itself to be “thriving.”³³

Former women’s colleges often rework their entire visual identity, logo, marketing materials and, through the strategic planning process that invariably precedes a decision to go coed, reexamine their recruitment strategies for their enrollment division. It is quite possible that much of the initial surge in enrollment during a transition to coeducation is from the increased visibility of the college in the media and these revitalized marketing programs. David Strauss of A&S has even been quoted as saying that this is the case.³⁴

Tuition discounting, currently R-MWC’s biggest problem, is acknowledged to be a marketing issue and can be solved by engaging in better marketing—targeting the right prospects, making savvy offers,³⁵ and using aid dollars as effectively as possible. Consider the success at Sweet Briar College, where the tuition discount rate has dropped from 50 percent to 44 percent between 2003 and 2005.³⁶

Finally, many institutions are using seed word-of-mouth campaigns in select areas outside of their usual regions to capture a meaningful number of “full payers” who have traditionally aspired to elite New England and Mid-Atlantic colleges. “Looking South is a viable option these days” and students are looking for schools with “a picturesque campus, time-honored traditions, and dotting faculty.”³⁷ R-MWC as a women’s college has these qualities in abundance.

#6: THE FINANCIAL MODEL WAS RUN WITH THE WRONG ASSUMPTIONS.

The argument for coeducation hinges on the financial model used to forecast the outcome of various scenarios. Although several presentations of the model have been offered, insufficient information has been provided to determine the underlying assumptions for each scenario and upon what the assumptions are based.

While the R-MWC administration believes that it is sufficient to state that an expert, Dr. Lucie Lapovsky, has reviewed the model, the real concern is the assumptions. Dr. Lapovsky was not asked to evaluate R-MWC's business practices and had no input or oversight of the scenarios that were run.

A look at the financial forecast models used to predict the performance of the scenarios requires close scrutiny of their underlying assumptions. Chris Burnley, Vice President of Finance and Administration for R-MWC, has stated that he presented the “mid” numbers for the coeducational scenario and the “high” numbers for the single-sex scenarios—presumably these scenarios were based on the A&S research results.

First Year Enrollment

The financial models used to predict the operating deficits and spendable endowment levels use 350 first year students for the coeducational platform. If we assume that the base student number used is 195 (from the “current situation” scenario) that is an increase of 80 percent. This is close to the maximum “as much as 85 percent” increase that A&S hypothesized after the first study (although no specific platform was associated with the growth at that time). That would seem to indicate that the 350 number is actually the “high” end of enrollment or at least certainly not a “mid” projection. The assumption used for the single-sex with platform scenario is 236, an increase of 21 percent from the 195 “current levels.” The A&S presentation of November 2005 uses a figure of “as much as 50 percent” for the single-sex with platform (Honors plus Arts) scenario. Given this, the “high” assumption for this scenario should be 293 students—57 students more than the scenario currently employs. So it appears that the numbers that were presented actually reflect the “high” numbers for the coeducational scenario and the “mid” numbers for single-sex based on looking at the first A&S research report. Chris Burnley's assumptions of coeducation are more optimistic and single-sex more pessimistic than appears warranted, or market research dictates.

Overall Residential Students

The assumption for the coeducational financial model's total enrollment of residential students is 1,100 students. This is an increase of 370 students from current enrollment. In contrast, the assumption for the single-sex scenario showed a far smaller increase to 741.

Given the correction to the first year class size number, the overall residential students figure for single-sex with platform should be increased to 920—an addition of 179 students.

Capital Improvement Assumptions

The difference in total capital improvements between the single-sex platform and the coeducational platform is \$42.5 million. This does not appear to be reflected in the cash flows and overall spending of the financial models that have been presented to alumnae. In order for an accurate

comparison of the two scenarios, this difference in capital costs for the changes should be shown in the models.

Capital Expenditures for Coeducational Change

The models show very similar behavior in the first few years. While R-MWC has advised that the costs of marketing under the single-sex model is equivalent to marketing plus a complete identity change (name, logo, signage, etc.) in the coeducational model this is open to question. Just creating a compelling new logo can be a very lengthy and expensive proposition and when one considers everywhere that the R-MWC name appears it will be expensive to implement as well.

Alumnae Giving

A&S research suggests that the unrestricted endowment funds required for the coeducational model are much less than those required for the single-sex with platform scenario. They state that it would require “somewhere in the order of current giving rates assuming appropriate gains are made in enrollment growth and discount rate reduction.”³⁸ However, in the same report they state that more than 75 percent of alumnae would be less likely to support a coeducational R-MWC (and that was without taking into account a name change and the questionable communications process). The larger alumnae survey conducted by the R-MWC Alumnae Association of 2,280 alumnae (as opposed to 500 in the A&S survey), after the Reading debate and close to the Board vote, determined that 60 percent of alumnae would cease all contributions to a coeducational R-MWC under a different name and an additional 15 percent would decrease their annual contributions.³⁹ If close to correct, the significant drop in alumnae giving will result in even larger annual deficits and more use of the endowment to offset these deficits. This is not shown in the coeducational platform’s numbers.

Scenarios

The scenarios presented show what R-MWC might expect of the operating deficit and spendable endowment levels if their plans are successful. There are no scenarios shown of what happens if the target of 350 first year students is not met or the total enrollment of 1,100 is not met, but all of the expenditures are made to try and attract men.

There are no scenarios that show best case versus worst case versus likely case, although such may have been run. Nor does it show to the Board of Trustees how fast the endowment will erode, if the capital improvements are made and the necessary targets are not met. What will the Board of Trustees decide to do if they don’t reach the required levels for a break-even scenario? Will academic standards be discarded just to get more bodies in the dorms? How will tuition discounting to attract male athletes of dubious academic quality in the initial years affect the discounting goals and the nature of the college community? When will the Board of Trustees be forced to sell the capital assets of the college and cease to exist? There potentially are many risks in the coeducational scenario which have not been shown.

The single-sex with Honors plus Arts scenario has not been fully explored from a financial perspective and should be before R-MWC opens its doors to men and takes on risks that could put it out of business in a few short years.

#7: IT IS POSSIBLE TO GROW THE ENDOWMENT SUFFICIENTLY TO STAY A WOMAN'S COLLEGE.

R-MWC has an endowment larger than that of many women's colleges and an endowment per student comparable or greater than some of the "Seven Sisters." The Board of Trustees claims that this endowment is apparently insufficient to secure R-MWC as a woman's college. When faced with alumnae asking "how much is needed to stay single-sex" the figure provided by trustees has ranged from \$100 million within two years to \$300 million within five years. The A&S November 2005 research provides a more clear-cut estimate (although it is dependent on many other factors) of \$90-\$175 million within five years depending on what success comes from enrollment efforts and tuition discounting reductions.⁴⁰

All other things being equal, the endowment does not currently earn enough money to cover R-MWC's deficit spending on an annual basis. The question then arises, how large does the endowment need to be for the principal to stay intact? This is largely determined by the amount of deficit spending. If the deficit is \$17 million as it was in 2002, then the endowment needs to be \$243 million with a rate of return of 7 percent. That was an extreme year however. In the last five years, the deficit spending has been mostly below \$4 million.⁴¹ At this level, R-MWC's endowment's targeted return on investment of 7 percent should cover this loss without spending the principal, allowing the endowment to grow modestly. So there is a disjoint between what R-MWC's past IRS 990s reflect of R-MWC's finances and what the A&S research and the financial model used in the strategic planning process predict.

Given that R-MWC has a higher endowment than many of its sister women's colleges, it is very likely that belt-tightening and a careful evaluation of all budgetary expenditures may yet be used to cure R-MWC's deficit spending issues. Hard choices may have to be made, but just because budgeting is difficult does not mean it is impossible. An independent line-by-line review of the budget may reveal cost-cutting options that have not yet been evaluated.

There are more capital investments necessary in the coeducational scenario of the strategic planning model—but what if R-MWC "builds it but they don't come"? The coeducational scenario represents a gamble on the part of the college—a gamble that eliminates the college's name, alienates its alumnae, and endangers its academic quality and reputation—all with the hope that enough students will want to pay to come and make R-MWC financially solvent.

#8: ALUMNAE GIVING TO THE COLLEGE WILL SUFFER TO A GREAT DEGREE.

Although many alumnae have expressed great upset with both the coeducational decision and the process and communications around the decision, R-MWC's administrators and trustees have stated that the majority of alumnae donors will return to their previous giving levels within a period of a few years. This assertion is based primarily upon the experiences of Wheaton College and Goucher College as outlined by R-MWC's internal research effort⁴² and the results of an A&S survey of 39 major donors.⁴³

From the internal R-MWC research, it appears that it took Goucher College about five years to reestablish its Annual Fund at the same level as before coeducation. Twenty years later, Goucher College has only about the same amount of total support as R-MWC has today.

Wheaton College, on the other hand, appeared to suffer only one “bad” year of Annual Fund giving, with an almost immediate rebound. Twenty years later, Wheaton College still has a smaller Annual Fund than R-MWC and alumnae publications indicate that the college is still trying to mitigate the negative feelings about coeducation and the decision-making process with some alumnae, particularly the “sour grapes” classes that were at Wheaton College during the coed change.⁴⁴

Is it reasonable to expect the same results at R-MWC? Wheaton College and Goucher College both made their coeducational decision at times of record low enrollments. It is conceivable that they did a better job of convincing their alumnae that coeducation was the only way for their colleges to continue.

As the November 2005 A&S research points out, up until very recently R-MWC alumnae were under the impression (fostered by years of development office and other college communications) that R-MWC was not only financially stable, but thriving.⁴⁵ Even as recently as the 2005 President’s Report, the college was described as “having the financial resources and talent to sustain us for quite some time.”⁴⁶ The timing of the final congratulatory campaign communication for the *Vita Abundantior* campaign (“We Did It!”) to coincide with interim President Worden’s mailing about R-MWC’s many struggles and the upcoming vote for coeducation caused a cognitive dissonance for many alumnae. They may not return as quickly, or at all, as the alumnae of other former women’s colleges.

In the November 2005 research summary, A&S points out that alumnae have a strong identification with the women’s college aspect of R-MWC and that more than three-quarters of alumnae would be less likely to give to a coed R-MWC even if coeducation made the college stronger.⁴⁷ This research did not take into account that the college’s name would have to change—something alumnae of Wheaton College and Goucher College were clearly not faced with.

A larger alumnae survey conducted by the R-MWC Alumnae Association of 2,280 alumnae (as opposed to 500 in the A&S survey), determined that 60 percent of alumnae would cease all contributions to a coeducational R-MWC under a different name and an additional 15 percent would decrease their annual contributions.⁴⁸

Finally, although the strategic planning website implies that most major donors were interviewed and agreed with the coeducational plan, several donors in the \$1 million or more range have stated that they were never contacted and they do not support the strategic plan.⁴⁹ The extreme lack of support shown for a coed R-MWC under a new name from both regular donors and some major donors calls into question the assumption that alumnae donors will return. Goucher College and Wheaton College faced different situations, in a different time, and under different circumstances than the alumnae of R-MWC today. These experiences are for a much more supportive alumnae base and would suggest R-MWC’s experience will fall short of even these colleges’ modest gains in alumnae support.

#9: BECOMING COEDUCATIONAL AND ADOPTING THE “BEST CASE” POSITIONING IS NOT THE ONLY VIABLE OPTION. THIS IS BECAUSE THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS WAS LESS THAN THOROUGH.

The R-MWC community has been repeatedly told that the strategic plan is the only option to keep R-MWC from closing its doors. Fortunately for R-MWC and supporters of women’s education that simply is not true. Even A&S, the research group hired by the Board of Trustees, has said there are other, single-sex, options for the college. At the community meeting held on campus on October 9th, the first time A&S has presented to students and alumnae, A&S confirmed that in their estimation single-sex options for R-MWC were viable and that R-MWC is the only women’s college they have worked with where coeducation was chosen by the college. A&S made it clear that it was the trustees’ choice to embrace coeducation. It was not an imperative.

Some trustees and R-MWC administrators have been quick to point out that there are risks in staying single-sex while they simultaneously seem to downplay the many risks of changing to a coeducational environment including: changing the name of the college, recruiting male athletes and students in a dwindling male population, undertaking expensive expansions to facilities (including athletic fields and other expenses not directly related to R-MWC’s educational mission or the lives of all students), and alienating alumnae. If risks are to be taken, shouldn’t they be taken to support the 115-year tradition of educating women at R-MWC instead of to speculate in the already crowded world of small, private coeducational colleges?

R-MWC’s strategic plan stands out from those of other colleges not so much for what it is but what it is not. Mount Holyoke spent a little under two years on “The Plan for Mount Holyoke 2010.”⁵⁰ However, instead of a “four-page draft strategic plan” written over two weeks a bare month before their vote, Mount Holyoke put together a 64-page plan, also considered a draft by them (and “*aspirational* rather than operational”), that in the appendices alone includes comprehensive financial projections through 2010 with all assumptions outlined for each year, a description of all facilities projects that are a part of the plan, explicit assessment criteria for the plan, an overview of their current enrollment marketing successes and failures and plans to overcome them, and a list of more than 25 background documents and studies that informed the plan (from marketing studies by A&S and Maguire Associates to facilities assessments, master landscape plans, and parking studies conducted by other internal and external consultants). This is in addition to the actual 38 pages of the plan itself.

How did Mount Holyoke produce such a more substantial document in a shorter period of time? In November 2001, Mount Holyoke formed a 25-member Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the College. The composition of this committee was distinctly different from the analogous Strategic Planning Steering Committee formed by R-MWC. R-MWC’s 15-member committee consists of nine trustees or former trustees (60 percent of the committee), four senior administrative staff (President, Vice President of Finance and Administration, Dean of the College, and the Director of Institutional Research/Secretary to the Board of Trustees), and two faculty members (Economics and Physics). Conversely, Mount Holyoke’s Committee consisted of only four trustees or former trustees (16 percent of the committee), three student representatives, five faculty members (Chemistry, Dance, two English, and Sociology), the president of the Alumnae Association, seven senior staff members (President, Assistant to the President/Secretary of the Board, Vice President

for Finance and Administration, Vice President for Enrollment and College Relations, Vice President for Development, Chief Information Officer, Acting Dean of the College, and Dean of Faculty), a staff council representative, an operations/policy council representative, and two communications professionals (Executive Director of Communications and Strategic Initiatives and Assistant Director of Communications). With clear representation from all college communities—students, faculty, staff, administration, trustees, and alumnae—and representational senior leadership from all operational areas, it is hardly surprising that their planning committee produced a more comprehensive and complete strategic plan.

After Mount Holyoke's committee was formed, it was organized into two subcommittees—one for educational priorities and one for administrative priorities. During the spring semester of 2002 these committees led “community-wide conversations” through forums, focus groups, via the Web, and within “committees, departments, programs, divisions, and other organizations and groups.” Using the information generated from these Mount Holyoke community sessions and materials and findings from previous studies and planning initiatives, the Ad Hoc committee produced a draft first document for community review and revision in October 2002.

Before the final draft of the plan was submitted for faculty and trustee vote in April 2003, the entire Mount Holyoke community was engaged in an active process to review and refine the draft plan in three iterations. Each of the three drafts was disseminated to the college community to promote discussion and debate with the goal to “gain consensus and develop a plan that resonates with the aspirations of the constituents of the institution.” Between the October 2002 presentation of the first draft and the April 2003 approval, the college held “numerous meetings, dialogues, symposia, and Web-based conversations” about each of the three successive drafts of the plan with all constituencies of the college, including alumnae. Upon the unanimous trustee approval of the plan that followed unanimous faculty approval of the final draft, Eleanor Graham Claus '55, chair of the board of trustees announced: “This Plan is a credit to the entire community and will call for the same broad collaboration in its implementation that was so evident in its conception.”⁵¹

R-MWC's strategic planning process, while longer in duration, bore none of the hallmarks of Mount Holyoke's successful participatory model. Alumnae were completely cut out of R-MWC's process until February 2006 when trustees began to hold “informational meetings” for alumnae in select cities to begin to explain why R-MWC was “looking at coeducation.” Alumnae were not asked to participate on the Steering Committee (all alumnae Steering Committee members are trustees or senior staff), review preliminary drafts of the plan or comment upon it at any stage. The draft wasn't even released until after the vote was taken. The Alumnae Association Board was presented with a copy of the plan August 4th, a mere month before the trustees' vote and “sworn to secrecy as to its contents.” R-MWC faculty and staff were not any more involved either. Although they benefited from at least two brief A&S presentations of research results, the faculty was only presented with the four-page draft in early August (again sworn to secrecy) and asked to comment on what “Global Honors” meant by mid-August—hardly much time to produce any detailed discussion or analysis. Arguing that students and alumnae participated in the plan because some of them were subjects of A&S' research is specious. Knowingly or unknowingly participating in a market research project does not constitute “being involved with the plan.”

R-MWC's lengthier planning process resulted in a four-page document that places R-MWC's future in something called "global honors," but doesn't even attempt to define it, and that is devoid of published financial projections, assumptions, or any evidence at all that the "plan" is economically feasible, attractive, or better for R-MWC than a host of other alternatives. The process was beset by secrecy and the lack of outside ideas or perspectives because it was controlled entirely by a small group of 15 people (the majority of whom are trustees, the group ultimately responsible for approving the plan). In the end, R-MWC's chair of the board of trustees did not get to congratulate R-MWC on successful community collaboration like her peer at Mount Holyoke. Instead, the announcement of R-MWC's strategic plan was accompanied by entreaties to the R-MWC community to accept a plan that only a few people had any input into.

#10: THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY ART AND SCIENCE DID NOT THOROUGHLY INVESTIGATE HOW TO MAKE R-MWC A STRONGER WOMAN'S COLLEGE.

While the details of much of the work done by A&S has remained "confidential," enough information has been presented on R-MWC's public website and within other documents to indicate that there are other research avenues that could have been explored to "identify a strong, true, and compelling distinction for the College as a single-sex institution that resonated with the College's constituencies, would attract increased enrollment, and would provide for the College' financial sustainability."⁵²

There are a few different approaches that A&S could have taken to better identify ways to strengthen R-MWC as a woman's college. One approach is relatively obvious. The first A&S study did not contain a research component for non-inquiring prospects. Part of assessing how to make R-MWC a stronger woman's college is to try and discover reasons why a larger percentage of the women who only apply to women's colleges or who already prefer women's colleges do not inquire about or apply to R-MWC. This type of study would also evaluate the visibility of R-MWC within this segment of prospects and compare the perceptions about R-MWC and other women's colleges within this prospect pool and across geographic regions. This type of research would result in information that could be used to more effectively target enrollment efforts, marketing communications, regional campaigns, financial aid packaging, and other key programs of the recruitment efforts of the college.

It is a fact that many alumnae of R-MWC did not intend to go to a woman's college yet something about R-MWC drew them enough to enroll and stay through graduation. They came to value the woman's college experience, but that wasn't their primary motivator when they were looking for a college. A&S could have conducted research to determine the influencing factors that made students and alumnae who never intended to go to a woman's college choose R-MWC. It is quite possible that the factors that make R-MWC so appealing to this segment are supported by or dependent upon the all-female campus. This is a more difficult research project to undertake but the results would have been very valuable. This research question would also have confirmed whether the factors that make R-MWC appealing to women would continue to exist in a coeducational environment—an important question for the Board of Trustees' consideration of coeducation.

Once A&S identified these highly influential factors that led women to choose R-MWC, even though they had no intention of going to a women's college (e.g. atmosphere, traditions, all-female leadership positions, prestige of graduates, and so on), then A&S could identify the common demographics and psychographics of these women (e.g. socio-economic factors, academic interests, hobbies, grade point averages, etc.) and their location (types of high schools, areas of the country, etc.)

The two research studies together would provide a much better picture of R-MWC's true prospect pool and its defining characteristics making targeted and more effective enrollment programs possible.

Even without these studies, A&S could have evaluated the existing marketing programs and prospect targeting decisions of R-MWC. The first study based many of its conclusions on R-MWC's current pool of inquirers, but the reality is that if errors were made in creating that pool then the research based upon it may have flaws. By way of example, 39 percent of the R-MWC inquirers surveyed by A&S stated that they had "only considered coeducational colleges."⁵³ One of the conclusions that A&S drew was that "converting more inquirers into applicants will require enormous effort" as the non-applicant inquirers' average overall rating for R-MWC was the lowest A&S had ever seen.⁵⁴ This result is unsurprising if the wrong students are in the pool to begin with, but this question may never have been asked.

Finally, the A&S study evaluated reactions to four models—Honors, Global, Leadership, and Exploration—but it is unclear where these models originated. Some faculty members have indicated that these four ideas came from R-MWC internal committee work completed prior to the A&S study; others, that they were based upon a two day "fact finding" trip A&S had with R-MWC. Regardless, it appears that the research was not "customer-focused." Ideally, the research first would have been dedicated to discovering what the market wants and what it thinks R-MWC already provides, then evaluating the market's desires in terms of what R-MWC could reasonably provide, and finally testing the customer-focused platforms created this way. Instead, it appears that R-MWC and/or A&S created four platforms they thought might appeal to prospects instead of first figuring out what R-MWC's prospects really want. This begs the earlier question of whether R-MWC really knows who its prospects are to begin with.

There seem to be many further avenues of research that can and should be explored to evaluate how R-MWC can stay a woman's college and better service the needs of students while remaining true to its mission and increasing its financial stability.

#11: A GLOBAL EMPHASIS IS NOT THE ANSWER TO R-MWC'S PROBLEMS.

A&S originally explored four possible distinctive themes that R-MWC could use to position itself, and two of these became fused in the "Global Honors" theme that it recommended on the basis of responses from alumnae, current students, inquirers, and admitted applicants. A&S simply polled these constituencies to find out what they liked the sound of and then recommended the winning message as "Global Honors" to R-MWC. There was no consideration of the academic integrity of the recommendation—how much would R-MWC have to do in order to do this well and be competitive—or of the total costs involved. During this process, there was no systematic effort to

consult faculty, even though a college's curriculum is normally the creation of its faculty. Instead, the Board of Trustees has charged the R-MWC faculty with the task of "implementing Global Honors"—figuring out what it means and then doing it. The faculty is obviously hampered in this task because it is not easy to figure out from the summary documents what "Global Honors" means.

The "honors" components seem to be the things that R-MWC already does and is noted for (see R-MWC's standing in the National Survey of Student Engagement, which takes note of a college's academically challenging liberal arts education, student-faculty collaboration, and enriching educational experiences, reported on R-MWC's own website.)⁵⁵ All of the goals named as part of the Strategic Plan's "distinctive academic identity" (see IIIA) are already served at R-MWC and are not new—intellectual engagement, work that is ambitious and challenging, thoughtful reflection, close faculty-student interaction, educating knowledgeable citizens of the world. The Spring 2006 A&S report mentions only two additional means to indicate an emphasis on honors: (1) honors scholarships (but this is currently known as tuition discounting, a practice that R-MWC has already identified as one that is detrimental to R-MWC's financial health), and (2) diplomas that recognize especially rigorous work (perhaps in a capstone or thesis course) and high academic achievement. This suggests that there is no additional increment of distinction available for R-MWC to capture in the "honors" component of "Global Honors". A&S has simply recommended that R-MWC continue doing what it does.

So perhaps the "new" part of the plan is the "Global" component. The Spring 2006 summary of the A&S report describes the "global" items as consisting of a "wide range" of foreign language offerings including fluency in Arabic, Chinese, Japanese as well as area studies expertise, study abroad or equivalent for all students, enhanced resources and facilities (such as a 24-hour news center), and "significant experiential experiences." This last item may merely mean internships with an international focus and study abroad programs, both of which are already available and very heavily used at R-MWC, which is also quite famous for its program in Reading, England. It is not clear what a 24-hour news center would be, other than perhaps a television tuned to CNN International or the BBC World Service, or an electronic library subscription to Reuters and the Associated Press, or various foreign news services and newspapers

Curriculum changes, new course offerings, and faculty recruitment all have to be considered slowly and carefully by the faculty concerned, and this process cannot be subordinated to marketing campaigns. If the strategic plan actually offered funds for these initiatives, they could be seriously considered, but in the absence of real resources to enlarge the curriculum, "Global Honors" seems to reduce to the very strengths that already constitute R-MWC's academic reputation. Rather than offering R-MWC new activities and new resources for assuming "the strongest possible position," it simply identifies R-MWC's existing strengths. This in fact suggests again that R-MWC already has a strong position and reputation, and simply needs to market these attributes to a larger portion of its market. R-MWC does not need to change what it is; it just needs to get the word out more effectively.

#12: ADMITTING MEN WILL NOT ALLOW R-MWC TO EDUCATE MORE WOMEN.

On multiple occasions R-MWC's administrators and trustees have argued that coeducation will actually give R-MWC an opportunity to educate more women than ever before. For example, in a

letter sent to all alumnae on August 14, 2006, interim President Worden describes reading the internal study that R-MWC conducted of other colleges that went coeducational and how it showed that each of the colleges studied “found that they were educating more women as a co-ed institution than they had before making the change.”⁵⁶

Unfortunately, that is not what the internal study showed. In the cases of Goucher College and Wheaton College (coed in 1986 and 1987 respectively), the colleges are actually educating fewer women today than before they went coed. Especially disturbing is that female enrollment decreased dramatically in the first few years after coeducation and took 10 years to return to the same level in Goucher’s case (Figure 2) and has yet to rebound to pre-coeducation levels in Wheaton’s case (Figure 3).⁵⁷ This is startling, particularly when the current “excess” of female students to male students is a matter of public record.⁵⁸ It is logical to assume that if these two colleges (the best real comparison to R-MWC in the set of five colleges reviewed in the internal study)⁵⁹ after twenty years have not yet reached a point where they are educating more women than before they became coeducational, it is highly questionable that R-MWC will be able to accomplish this feat or even try to do so.

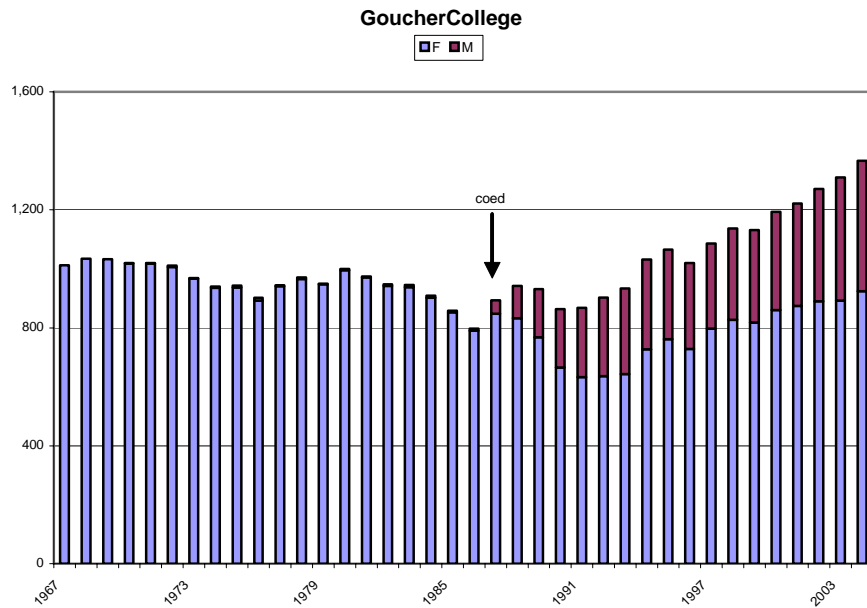


Figure 2: Undergraduate Enrollment by Gender 1967-2004 Goucher College⁶⁰

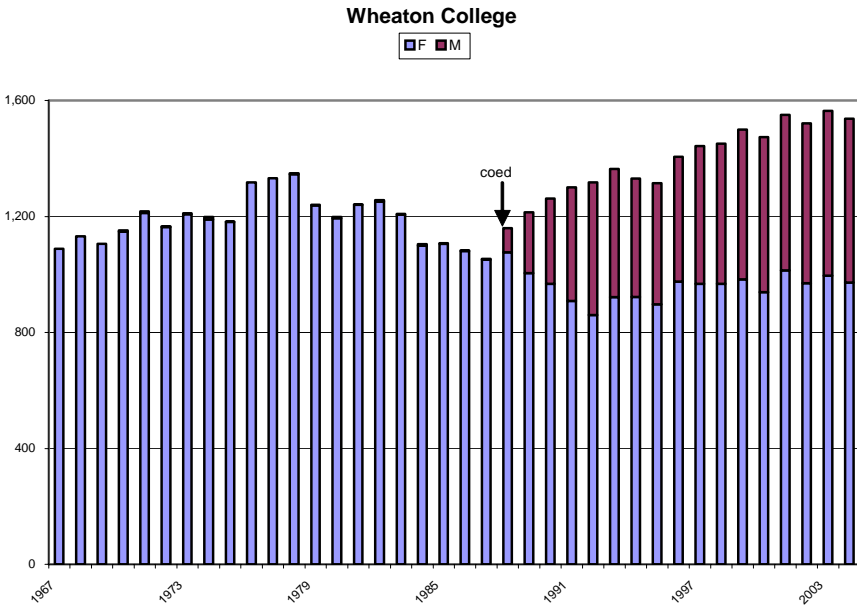


Figure 3: Undergraduate Enrollment by Gender 1967-2004 Wheaton College⁶¹

It is important to note that while the A&S summary report provided on the R-MWC Strategic Planning website states that applications to a coeducational college will increase, there is no evidence presented showing that those applications will be from academically qualified students, or that those applications will convert into a larger sustainable increased enrollment.⁶² David Strauss of A&S has even warned against women’s colleges reading “too much” into the initial enrollment success that former women’s colleges have claimed to enjoy once they begin admitting men. He further cautioned that it may just be due to publicity around the change and not a long-term effect.⁶³

Hood College is a good case in point. After allowing male residential students in 2003 (Hood has had male commuter students since 1971), the college did have applications increase and did experience enrollment growth.⁶⁴ The type of growth is interesting to consider, though. In 2005 the college only accepted 51 percent of its applications—an apparent dramatic increase in its selectivity. However, the quality of the entering students in terms of average GPA and SAT scores actually has decreased since the college became coeducational, indicating that rather than being more selective the college is actually receiving more applications from students who are simply unqualified.⁶⁵

There has been a demographic shift within Hood’s student body as well. The number of international students in the first year class has decreased by 50 percent⁶⁶ and the percentage of students from in-state has dramatically risen. For instance, of 278 students in the class entering Fall 2005, more than half (173 students) were from Maryland⁶⁷ and since 2001 the college has experienced a 35 percent increase in Frederick County students alone.⁶⁸ So while Hood is educating more women in the sense that its entering female population went from 111 in 2001 to 156 in 2005⁶⁹ it appears unable to attract the type of population with the same academic qualities that it did when a women’s college, and it is quickly becoming a regional, if not a local, college. It is doubtful that this is the kind of enrollment growth that R-MWC’s strategic plan is meant to realize.

There are two larger questions here as well. Many of the women's colleges that went coeducational conducted sizable marketing campaigns and retooled their enrollment efforts as part of their coeducational implementation. For example, Hood College adopted new recruiting strategies for every segment of students, "refreshed" its visual identity and logo, redesigned the college's website, redid all of the college's marketing publications, increased advertising, and generally reworked all marketing programs at the same time that it went coeducational.⁷⁰ So are the increases in applications and enrollment due to coeducation or increased marketing? Equally as important, is the education that the women are receiving at former women's colleges the same quality as the education they would have received in a single-sex college?

#13: THE EDUCATION THAT R-MWC WILL PROVIDE WOMEN IN A COEDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT WILL NOT BE AS GOOD AS THE EDUCATION WOMEN AT R-MWC RECEIVE TODAY.

Even if R-MWC could achieve what Goucher College and Wheaton College have failed to do in twenty years and educate more women by admitting men, the question remains as to what quality that education would be.

Notable recent studies comparing women's colleges and otherwise comparable coeducational institutions suggest formidable challenges to providing the same high quality education (and corresponding career results) to women in a coed environment.

Women learn better at women's colleges.

- According to a study using the National Survey of Student Engagement, students at women's colleges report higher levels of academic challenge, more active and collaborative learning, more student-faculty interaction, and greater likelihood of engaging in integrative activities that lead to deep learning than their female peers at comparable coeducational institutions, even when controlling for individual and institutional characteristics.⁷¹
- In a recent study, students at women's colleges report more regular interaction with faculty members and that their colleges helped them learn more about themselves, hone their quantitative analysis skills and develop a desire to help their communities more than female students at comparable coed colleges.⁷²

Women have more rewarding, career-building personal experiences at women's colleges.

- Women's college students engage in more leadership activities inside and outside of the classroom (including participating in honors studies programs and taking extracurricular student leadership roles) than their female counterparts at coed liberal arts colleges.⁷³

Women attain higher career goals after attending women's colleges.

- A higher proportion of women's college graduates go on to receive doctoral degrees compared to women graduating from comparable coeducational institutions.⁷⁴

- Graduating from a women's college positively affects women's career success, as measured by likelihood of being listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who Among Black Americans*, and *Who's Who Among Hispanic Americans*.⁷⁵

Arguably, this same kind of education simply cannot be provided in a coed environment—even one within a college that is aware of possible gender bias.

This assertion is supported by the internal research conducted by R-MWC faculty on former women's colleges that have become coeducational. The interviews indicated that male students hold the preponderance of leadership positions at the former women's colleges, even though the men are in the minority.⁷⁶

Rather naively, the faculty report also states that “co-education attracted a new variety of female students. These women are more social and outgoing, dress up for class and seem to care more about their appearance.”⁷⁷ Rather than considering that this may be a reflection of social pressures to “dress for the audience of male students” the interviewers (and the faculty being interviewed) have assumed that this reflects a genuine preference on the part of the students rather than a requirement dictated by the new coeducational campus.

According to a study by Duke University during the 2002-2003 school year, undergraduate women feel pressure “to hide their intelligence in order to succeed with their male peers” as well as pressure to reflect “effortless perfection” described as “the expectation that one would be smart, accomplished, fit, beautiful, and popular—and that all this would happen without visible effort.”⁷⁸ Ironically, even after expending all of this effort, these same women are denied a positive dating environment at Duke—instead it is a culture of “hook-ups” and wild parties.⁷⁹ The “new women” of the former women's colleges may very well be in the same position as the undergraduate women at Duke—constrained by the new coeducational campus environment to engage in behaviors and activities that may detract from their learning experiences.

From a female student's perspective, transitioning R-MWC to a fully coeducational institution will fundamentally change the experience of being at R-MWC. Most of our society functions in a more or less coeducational environment, with few organizations and social institutions existing solely for women (and when one does find such organizations, they often target individual aspects of women's lives, such as motherhood or health). A fully functional liberal arts college dedicated wholly to women, with a full complement of majors and courses in both traditionally female fields (dance, art) and traditionally non-female fields (math, natural and physical sciences, theater set construction), is a very rare and special institution. By the simple fact of being dedicated 100 percent to women, such an institution sends a powerful signal (and students may not always even be consciously aware of this signal) that here, women can express and fulfill a well-rounded identity that can encompass a range of choices across the spectrum of academic fields and extracurricular activities, and they can do so completely free from the complications of having attention being drawn to their gender.

Many maintain that this psychological impact probably acts as strongly on the dance major who avoids science and math classes as on the physics major. When that dance major performs in the theater, simply knowing that women are expected to and are trained to operate the light board and perhaps even design the lighting, run the music, and build the set, has the effect of empowering that

dancer to see this capability in herself and her sisters, and in the women she will encounter throughout the rest of her life. Whether or not she herself ever chooses to operate a light board or contemplate a physics theory, the fact that she has lived in an environment where women are expected to do all those things, because there is no one else to do it, may subtly but significantly alter her future expectations of women everywhere, and therefore her interactions with those women, for the empowerment of all. Obviously this applies all the more to those women who actually choose to engage in male-dominated fields while at the college. By becoming a college officially dedicated to both sexes, this powerful psychological effect will be lost, even if only a small number of men actually enroll – it will no longer be a place dedicated to women and therefore automatically free from any preconceptions of gender roles.

Most people who have been acculturated in a coeducational society (which is the vast majority of all people) carry typical, unconscious gender schemas that shape their relative perceptions, expectations, and evaluations of men and women and thus how they interact with both genders. Numerous classroom observation-based and laboratory-based studies demonstrate just how the subtle operation of gender schemas result in women “accumulating disadvantage” compared to men. For example, one carefully designed experiment shows that when trained men and women practice identical, pleasantly assertive group leadership behaviors, such as making suggestions for group decisions, the women leaders are significantly more likely to receive unconscious, subtly negative facial reactions from other group participants than are the men leaders. Other evidence also indicates that women in leadership positions typically have to work harder to be recognized as leaders and to hold the attention of other people. Classroom studies have shown that through subtle behavioral cues invisible even to themselves, teachers often discourage female students from speaking up in class discussions and encourage male students, and when female students do speak up, their contributions are less likely to be acknowledged by their peers and professors. In another study, a large sample of university department heads were given identical resumes of fictitious applicants for a faculty position, some resumes bearing a male name and some a female name. When asked to evaluate the applicants according to what rank they should enter at if given the job, those with a male name were assigned a higher entry rank than those with a female name. These are just a few examples of how both men and women subtly discourage women from taking leadership roles, pay less attention to female students in the classroom, and underrate women with the same qualifications as men.⁸⁰

These biases are mostly invisible to the perpetrators, the victims, and other observers. However, despite their subtlety, such behaviors have the effect of systematically discouraging women from being heard, from taking charge, and from benefiting fully from learning opportunities. In fact, the effects of such disadvantages have been documented by studies of formerly women’s colleges that have become coeducational, in which, for example, soon after becoming coeducational, males became disproportionately represented in student leadership positions. The domination of men in classroom discussions and in the student community to a degree far beyond their proportional numbers, not to mention the decline in proportions of female graduates going on to earn medical and doctoral degrees,⁸¹ are all commonly reported evidence of gender schemas beginning to operate in women’s colleges that have become coeducational. R-MWC faculty and staff are just as likely to fall back on unconscious gender schemas as the undoubtedly well-meaning faculty and staff at these other colleges. Having had little if any recent practice in counteracting the operation of these

schemas by teaching in an all-female environment, R-MWC faculty are especially vulnerable to continuing them.

Considering the recent acknowledgement of interim President Worden that individual attention may decline with the admission of men,⁸² there seems to be little guarantee that the faculty will be able to create an environment to encourage the excellent education of women within a coeducational environment and protect women from societal pressures to “look good and act dumb.”

#14: NOT ALL STUDENTS WANT URBAN CAMPUSES AND PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES.

There is no question that for many high-school seniors, a large public university in an urban locale is a desirable option. There is also no question, however, that Randolph-Macon Woman’s College will never be a large public university in an urban center whether it becomes coeducational or stays single-sex.

There are many students who do not want to attend public universities or live on urban campuses. Take this anecdote from an R-MWC parent: “My daughter was only looking at liberal-art colleges in a small community with enrollment under 4,000, large state and private colleges did not even make her first cut.”⁸³ Likewise, with the booming interest in outdoor adventure, it’s logical to think that R-MWC could easily capitalize on this trend with current high school students by offering outdoor adventure experiences. R-MWC is geographically situated to become a leader in outdoor adventure trips which would not only capitalize on its non-urban location but would also teach skills of self-reliance and confidence.

Public education has the potential to become a less-than-desirable choice over time as costs skyrocket. In 2003, tuition rates at public universities climbed at twice the rate of private college tuition.⁸⁴ Many students may find it hard to rationalize paying high tuition and fees for a university where they will be in classes with a hundred or more students and be taught by a graduate assistant instead of a professor. Accordingly, it may be easier for those same students and their parents to justify a higher price tag for a private education offering an exceptional experience.

Also consider that one woman’s “urban” is another woman’s “rural.” Lynchburg may seem like the most rural of “boonies” to a New York City native, but to a woman from a small town in the Midwest, it is more urban than she may have ever experienced before. That said, there are plenty of students from big cities to small farming communities that want to attend college in Virginia. Virginia is coming back in vogue for New England students who are “sick of Pennsylvania” and has always held an allure for students from California and Texas who are charmed by the historic buildings and Blue Ridge Mountains. R-MWC to date has also done a very poor job of highlighting the exceptional natural resources of the surrounding area and capitalizing on the many possible outdoor activities, underselling the many benefits of its location.

#15: ADMITTING MEN WILL NOT KEEP ACADEMIC STANDARDS HIGH AND MAY EVEN LOWER THEM.

Academic quality is supposed to be non-negotiable in the strategic plan. Keeping high academic standards is important for maintaining the good reputation that R-MWC has earned to date and

important to a faculty who do not want the academic standing of their institution to fall. The plan also insists that increases in enrollment can be made without any compromise of student quality or diversity. In fact, the strategic plan gravely endangers both, undermining its own premises. Three separable issues endanger R-MWC's high academic standing: athletics, money, and men.

First, the effort to increase enrollment incorporates a strong emphasis on athletics. This perverse emphasis on recruiting athletes, female as well as male – for whom very expensive facilities are to be built – is certain to harm academic quality in the student body. According to Joanne Creighton, President of Mount Holyoke College, recruiting athletes and emphasizing athletics in attracting applicants simply recruits the wrong kind of student and leaves the educational mission in the lurch.⁸⁵ To the extent that R-MWC's strategic plan will place resources in physical facilities (the chief recruiting device envisioned in this plan and also at the other women's colleges that have gone co-educational), new spending will not go toward teaching or research, and R-MWC academic faculty may feel stretched thin and academics may suffer. The internal research conducted by R-MWC faculty also indicated that male athletes recruited by the former women's colleges were sometimes of lower academic quality and this caused some problems for the faculty and other students.⁸⁶

Second, the new strategic plan will pay for these athletic facilities with a lower rate of tuition discounting than is currently used. Thus the students to be recruited are expected to come without the level of scholarship aid that R-MWC has engaged in the past (and that in fact most liberal arts colleges routinely engage in). It is likely that the college will have to recruit and accept students on the basis of their wallets not their academic preparation to some extent to meet the outlined goals. Both academic quality and economic and ethnic diversity in the student body will decline, and scholarships for international students will have to be reduced. A student body of less diversity is hardly fitting as part of a college that intends to maintain R-MWC's past efforts at internationalization, or even to build on them as part of a new "Global Honors" emphasis.

Third, there is also every indication that academic quality will fall simply because the school will recruit male students. There is an alarming demographic trend nationally for a decreasing percentage of men of college age to attend college at all,⁸⁷ and those who do are less interested in academic performance than their female classmates at the same institutions.⁸⁸ Thus there is every reason to think that in recruiting men, the college will have to stoop to lower levels of academic quality in the applicant pool than if it offered those same slots to women, and that once these men arrive on campus they will constitute a drag on the intellectual atmosphere. For poorly understood but alarming reasons entirely beyond the college's control, bringing men to the college is virtually certain to damage the educational mission, undermining the premises on which the strategic plan is supposedly based, and very worrying to a faculty and administration interested in maintaining academic quality.

This projected decline is not just speculative or hypothetical – there is concrete evidence of decline from schools that have recently gone coeducational.⁸⁹ Even without a drop in tuition discounting. In effect, the strategic plan seems guaranteed to destroy R-MWC's reputation for academic excellence and over time the faculty's academic standing will deteriorate along with R-MWC's. The damage will not merely be abstract – daily interactions with students will be less intellectually

vibrant, the classroom atmosphere will deteriorate, and faculty and the administration will face daily reminders that the educational mission is suffering.

#16: THE HONOR CODE WILL COLLAPSE, THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY WILL SUFFER, AND CHERISHED TRADITIONS WILL BE LOST.

Announcements by senior staff and trustees about the strategic plan have emphasized that coeducation will not adversely affect the Honor Code, R-MWC's sense of community, or traditions that many faculty, alumnae and students hold dear.

In the internal research conducted by R-MWC of former women's colleges, issues with the Honor Code at those colleges (that had them) were noted. Specifically, male students are "much less respectful of the principle of dual-responsibility," after coeducation there have been more honor violations and more forgiveness of honor violations and in general an increase in plagiarism and cheating has been observed.⁹⁰

Since coeducation, Hood College has been struggling with its Social Honor Code and its Academic Honor Code.⁹¹ The Internet and social networking sites are rife with students complaining about how the "new students" attracted by the "new Hood" have caused problems. As an example, in a September 2005 posting on a social networking site a current Hood College student stated:

As far as the Academic Honor Code, it depends on the classes. With the Psych and Poli Sci/Law Departments, they've had extensive problems over the past couple of years with cheating. I brought it up to SGA and Dean White and revisions were made to it, but honestly, the honor code is going to fall in another couple of years. The school is getting too big and a lot of those who are seniors or juniors and care about the honor code are just so disgusted with the incoming freshmen that they just want to get OUT and don't care about having to deal⁹²

Wheaton College's Honor Code, generally well respected outside of the college, is also the subject of student dissatisfaction on the Internet with some students calling it a "joke."⁹³ In each of its most recent strategic plans, Wheaton College has identified "revitalizing" or "strengthening" the Honor Code as a high priority, clearly indicating that it is an issue of concern for them.⁹⁴

It isn't just the Honor Code that suffers at former women's colleges. The college community itself changes and not always for the better. R-MWC's own research indicated that increased nighttime security is needed on newly coeducational campuses, incidences of vandalism and property damage rise, and alcohol use (including underage drinking) increases. Again, these issues are frequently the topic of conversation in Internet chat rooms and these problems are well-documented.⁹⁵ Campus drinking is such a concern at Hood College that special campus meetings have been convened between the student body and administrators. At Wheaton College a "new campus approach to problem drinking" has made the list of priorities for the college's strategic plan.⁹⁶

Campus community, friendliness, and traditions were identified as the "top reason" current students chose R-MWC in the August Alumnae Association Survey.⁹⁷ The sense of community and campus atmosphere will certainly be changed by coeducation, but there is no doubt at all that the traditions will change. The internal R-MWC research found that all former women's colleges had their

traditions change whether by student lack of interest after coeducation, intentional elimination by the administration, or alteration to appeal to men. In the November 2005 A&S report, A&S recommends that “tribute” be paid to the women’s college history of R-MWC after coeducation. They suggest women’s scholarships, special women-only traditions or rituals, or “an annual celebration and community service day devoted to women’s issues”—a far cry from the “every day devoted to women’s issues” environment that exists on campus today.⁹⁸

#17: RESIDENTIAL MEN ARE NOT THE ANSWER TO R-MWC’S SOCIAL LIFE ISSUES.

Dissatisfaction with campus social life was identified as a major problem for R-MWC’s current students.⁹⁹ However, the same students that when surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with their social lives also saw coeducation as having a negative effect on their college experience. Beyond the differences in the classroom, R-MWC students likely already suspect that having residential men may do far more than make it “easier” to make male friends. The internal research conducted by R-MWC faculty of former women’s colleges documented increased alcohol use on campus after coeducation as well as more vandalism and property damage.¹⁰⁰ Hood College, who recently went coeducational on a residential basis, has had to conduct an ongoing series of meeting to address complaints from students about dorms on campus where drinking and partying is so rampant even on weeknights that students cannot study or even sleep at times.¹⁰¹

Residential men aren’t the answer to social life problems. Other women’s colleges aren’t as lucky as Barnard College to have a Columbia University right across the street, yet they manage to provide satisfying social opportunities for their students. Sixty percent of the current R-MWC students surveyed by A&S believed that R-MWC’s location makes having a social life difficult.¹⁰² As A&S recommended in 2005, increased shuttles to other destinations both within Lynchburg and outside of the town (e.g. Charlottesville, Roanoke, Blacksburg, and Washington) could dramatically improve the location issue for students. Thirty percent of students identified lack of social contact with men as having a negative impact on their social life.¹⁰³ There are some classes and clubs at R-WMC that already coordinate with a similar group at a coeducational college or a male single sex college (e.g. the Model United Nations Club makes its annual field trip to New York City with Lynchburg College’s club). Other clubs and classes could be enhanced to hold joint meetings, speaker’s events, field trips, or other coordinated activities to provide an environment where R-MWC students could make friends with members of the opposite sex that share similar interests.

A way to significantly increase the social life of students is to commit to changes in housing. Many upper-level students would like off-campus, apartment or suite-style housing options to foster increased independence and responsibility. This type of housing arrangement lends itself to more robust social lives for students because, if nothing else, they feel more in control of their environment and more responsible for their own entertainment. The housing issue has been a concern of students for many years and needs to be addressed regardless of the coeducational or single-sex status of the college.

#18: THE COLLEGE HAS NOT DONE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO STAY SINGLE-SEX.

R-MWC administrators and trustees have argued that everything has been done to keep R-MWC a woman's college. Is that really the case? A&S is well-respected as a marketing communications consultancy firm—were they used to conduct a real evaluation of R-MWC's enrollment marketing programs and materials since marketing is critical to enrollment success? No. They looked at the programs as part of a very busy two-day fact finding mission to learn all about R-MWC. Even with the short time spent reviewing enrollment practices, they indicated that some incremental changes could be made immediately,¹⁰⁴ but based on their brief evaluation wrote off the chances of improved marketing helping R-MWC significantly.

R-MWC's tuition discounting policies are way out of line with comparable schools, yet R-MWC appears resigned that it will be unable to lower the discount rate without going coeducational. Has R-MWC tried removing the discount matrix from the website and collateral materials? Has R-MWC engaged in any recent financial aid optimization with the help of outside consultants to improve the tuition discounting problem? Apparently not. Did R-MWC make alumnae aware of the need for increased financial support or R-MWC would have to become coeducational? No, instead alumnae were told R-MWC was thriving and financially sound right up until this summer when the coeducation vote mailing came—even though the November 2005 A&S research concluded that alumnae had a false positive impression of R-MWC's financial situation.¹⁰⁵

#19: THE COLLEGE IS NOT IN CRISIS—THE DECISION WAS MADE HASTILY.

In the 2005 President's Report, President Bowman congratulated R-MWC and the Board of Trustees for undertaking the strategic planning process while R-MWC was in a position of strength. The 2005 President Report states:

So here we are: a College with an astonishing track record of producing bright and successful graduates; strong and vibrant academic programs; an endowment of \$133 million; and the largest campaign in the College's history with current receipts and commitments of more than \$98 million. Why, given all of this, did the Board of Trustees see fit to begin a process that has resulted in market research, valuation of College assets, even a study of the possibility of going co-ed?... We are not an institution in financial crisis. **We have the financial resources and talent to sustain us for quite some time.** But, given the market forces I am about to describe, you will see the Board's wisdom in engaging in long-term planning now, with the College in a position of strength, **rather than waiting 8 or 10 years...**¹⁰⁶ (emphasis added)

The implication is that R-MWC is in a position to take its time. Perhaps not 10 years, but surely two years or perhaps even four or five years to conceive and implement a well-researched, comprehensive strategic plan.

The Board of Trustees feels that time is of the essence. At times they have told alumnae that the endowment will lose \$14 - \$16 million per year if we wait two years to make this change.¹⁰⁷ At the October 4th finance presentation Chris Burnley gave another figure, stating that the college would lose \$7 million one year and \$8 million the next for a total loss of \$15 million to the endowment

over two years. The endowment, however, grew from 2002 to 2005 going from \$139 million to \$155 million. Because R-MWC has kept its liabilities (bonds) roughly steady over that time, the net assets of the college have grown as well.

Although R-MWC must curb practices like overgenerous tuition discounting and needs to carefully steward R-MWC's financial resources to rein in some expenses while allowing necessary others, it does not appear that R-MWC is in an imminent financial crisis.

One issue that remains outstanding is the lack of a college president. Leadership is critically important to the future success of R-MWC and it is imperative that R-MWC attract a president that is compatible with the R-MWC community and has the qualifications, experience, and drive to do the work that is necessary to ensure R-MWC's future health. However, most people would agree that they would rather see R-MWC keep an interim president for a few years and take the time to ensure that R-MWC is in the best position to attract an exceptional new president, than to leap into coeducation "just to have the decision done" so that recruiting can proceed. Coeducation is a fundamental change for the college and should not be adopted in haste just to meet a recruiting timetable.

#20: TRUSTEES CAN STILL CHANGE THEIR VOTE NOW.

When asked to reconsider the strategic plan vote, administrators and some trustees have asserted that R-MWC has gone too far down the coeducational path to turn back. Given that just one month has passed since the vote was taken (and trustees assured alumnae that the vote was "for real" and not just a sham "rubberstamp"),¹⁰⁸ that on August 22nd Dean William Coulter explained to parents that "until about six weeks ago, many remained skeptical that the steering committee would recommend the change to coeducation. It seemed very remote and very unlikely, and thus not something that there was any reason to bring forward," and that the draft strategic plan wasn't even presented to the Board of Trustees until August 1st, it seems that not much could have been done to date to advance the cause of coeducation .

It isn't too late to change the vote—no male student has matriculated at R-MWC as a member of the class of 2011. Current students haven't transferred to our sister colleges yet. R-MWC's alumnae still love the college and are willing to make sacrificial donations of time and money to keep her a woman's college. All that remains is for you, a trustee of R-MWC, to recognize that you didn't have all of the information necessary to make the best decision on September 9th and that now you do. Please change your vote and commit to doing the work necessary to make the changes to R-MWC required to ensure that she can once again find herself ranked as one of the finest women's colleges in the nation.

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